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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Snow, snow, and more snow! It may not be as bad as initially forecast, but the fact remains that we're still in for more snow over the next few days. We've had enough! There's about four feet of this stuff on the ground already, with about another foot on its way. Even out here in the suburbs, we're running out of places to put this stuff! I'm certainly getting my monies worth with our snow thrower!

To make things worse, the freezing temperatures are also taking its toll. We wake up in the morning and we're "lucky" if the temperature is above zero! Add the howling winds lately, and you can imagine just how cold it is around here! Even the dogs don't want to stay out too long, if they are willing to go out in the first place! Not fit for man or beast...

So, while we try to thaw out here in the Northeast, I hope you're all settled-in and ready for another issue!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - New 3DS XL Is Nintendo s Most Potent Portable!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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The New 3DS XL Is Nintendo s Most Potent Portable

Nintendo could use a power-up.

We ve known about the Wii U s sales problems for a while now, of course. More surprising? The 3DS, which was once considered a buoy in a storm, is slowly starting to sink.

While there are now an impressive 50 million 3DS units in the wild, sales are slowing down. Blame it on smartphones or free-to-play or whatever you want, but the fact remains that even with great-selling software like Super Smash Bros. and Pokemon, fewer people are buying 3DS systems. Nintendo has even lowered its fiscal year forecast. Companies hate doing that.

The good news? The company has a plan, one that should be familiar to longtime Nintendo watchers: Tweak the thing and release a new model.

Nintendo has already done it twice before with the 3DS. First came the 3DS XL, a boon for gamers with adult-size hands. Then came the 2DS, a flat, indestructible doorstop stripped of its 3D capabilities but built to weather the bumpy lifestyle of a 5-year-old.

Now we get the New Nintendo 3DS XL. Already out in Japan (as is the regular-size New 3DS, which isn t making the trip overseas), it hits stores February 13 for $200. But while its low-effort name leaves something to be desired, this is actually the handheld s biggest jump; it s technically the most powerful 3DS available, boasting a new processor, improved 3D tech, and a few very handy physical changes. The result is undoubtedly the best 3DS system yet, though it s not without some head-scratching missteps.

At first glance the New 3DS XL looks awfully similar to the regular 3DS XL, but open up the device and you ll find a slew of little improvements. The most important? A tiny nub, of all things.

For years 3DS gamers have complained about the lack of a second analog stick, and while Nintendo s remedy is a bit small, the new C-stick sits nicely tucked above the face buttons and works surprisingly well. It s a boon for camera control, especially in a third-person game like the upcoming The Legend of Zelda: Majora s Mask 3D.

Nintendo also decided to free up the sides by moving the volume slider up to the top screen and ditching the Wi-Fi toggle switch (Wi-Fi is now built-in). This means you won t accidentally mute it with your left hand or switch off Wi-Fi with your right. Two new buttons, ZR and ZL, join the standard L and R triggers on the back of the device.

A few other tweaks seem more cosmetic than functional. The Home button has shrunk, Start and Select have shifted to the right, and the power button, stylus holder, and game card slot can now be found on the bottom front.

The new unit feels sturdy and sleek. It s a hair larger than the 3DS XL, but that tiny increase is mitigated by what amounts to a wealth of intelligent redesigns.

Messing with the placement of knobs and buttons doesn t exactly herald a significant leap. Futzing with its power? That s big.

There s a faster processor, and you definitely feel it. Games load more

quickly on the New 3DS XL compared to the old one (Super Smash Bros. showed a good four-second boost in my tests), and typically sluggish activities like accessing the eShop or bringing up your Mii Plaza just seem to work better.

So does the 3D, thanks to Nintendo s new Super Stable tech. Improved facial tracking has effectively widened the viewing angle for 3D; you no longer have to look at it dead-on to get the effect to work. It s a vast improvement, cutting down the annoying flicker and subtle eyestrain that made 3D gaming on the regular 3DS XL a drag. I m a little surprised Nintendo decided to do anything about the 3D   the fad s kind of over, right?   but kudos to them for attending to it. Maybe now I ll actually turn the 3D on from time to time.

One caveat: Despite tweaking the 3D, Nintendo didn t touch the relatively poor screen resolution. It s still running at 400 x 250 resolution, a far cry from the PlayStation Vita (960 x 554) or even your new-ish iPhone 6 (1334 x 750). The games still look decent, but it s a missed opportunity.

Fans of Nintendo s Amiibo toy line are in luck, however: The New 3DS XL includes NFC (near-field communication) support, which allows you to bring Amiibo figures into 3DS games. And while typically these sorts of changes lead to a crummier battery life, the New 3DS actually lasts a tad longer on a charge than the older systems. Magic!

The added power also means the New 3DS XL will be able to play certain games that the older models will not.

This isn t the first time Nintendo has fractured its user base in this way   the DSi had a handful of exclusive game cards that wouldn t run on other DS systems   but it s certainly a line in the sand.

I wouldn t worry too much about this for now. Nintendo has announced only one New 3DS XL exclusive so far: Xenoblade Chronicles 3D, a port of a 2012 Wii role-playing game due out in April. It s a safe bet that, for a while at least, very few game makers will want to alienate the tens of millions of gamers who own an old 3DS by making games playable only on this system. Unless you re absolutely dying to play Xenoblade on a handheld (and, to be fair, the Wii version was pretty awesome), there s little incentive to get a New 3DS for the new games. Yet.

More irksome than splitting up its user base with exclusive games, though, is how Nintendo chose to package the New 3DS XL.

Specifically, they chose to package it without an AC adapter.

Open up the New 3DS XL box, yank out the new handheld, and watch it sit there like a brick because you can t charge it. You wouldn t really know this if you just went out and bought one, though. Here s how Nintendo has chosen to advertise this rather significant omission:

Always read the fine print. (Nintendo)

Since the New 3DS XL uses the same proprietary adapter as the older models (it s compatible with chargers packaged with the 2DS, 3DS, 3DS XL, DSi, and DSi XL), Nintendo thinks you probably have one sitting around right now, so why would you want to pay extra for another? They re saving you money by not including one in the box!

Unless, you know, you re one of the roughly 7.1 billion or so who don t

have one. Nintendo s pulled this move before in Japan and Europe, but it s the first time they ve tried it in North America.

It drives me nuts. If you re trying to sell more 3DS systems, alienating potential new owners is baffling. Even the smartphone industry, which has convinced people to upgrade to new phones every two years, ensures new users can get up and running out of the box.

The solution is to just go buy an adapter online. It only costs $10. At best, this is annoying; at worst, it will drive some poor, excited kid to tears when he stares at a brand-new, unusable video game system.

With no charger in the box, Nintendo is saying, loud and clear, that the New 3DS XL is really intended to be an upgrade for existing 3DS owners. And sure enough, you can transfer your current 3DS content to a New 3DS XL via Wi-Fi, which is relatively painless.

However, you can t simply remove the SD memory card in your current system and pop it into the new one, because Nintendo has switched to a microSD format. You can t fit SD into a microSD slot, plus Nintendo weirdly decided to trap the microSD card inside the unit itself. Wanna get to it? You ll need a tiny screwdriver.

And there s a good chance avid 3DS gamers will want to do just that, because the built-in card is a paltry 4 GB. I was able to transfer only five digital games from my old 3DS XL to the new one. The rest were deleted, and while I can freely re-download them onto the new system, I certainly don t have room for them unless I upgrade the memory, too.

This isn t a deal breaker a 32 GB microSD costs about $20 but it s a seemingly needless hurdle for the die-hard fans Nintendo is hoping will plunk down $200 for the upgrade. If this device is indeed for upgrading, Nintendo should give gamers enough memory to make it quick and easy. No one buys a new smartphone with less memory on it.

Ultimately, though, both of these headaches are solvable. And should you have $200 burning a hole in your pocket, a large-ish microSD card, and a spare charger handy, absolutely go for it. If you re totally new to the 3DS ecosystem, though, be warned that this system will actually cost you $210 $230 with a decent amount of memory.

The thing is, even at that price, it s worth it. The New 3DS XL is an excellent system, an improved one, and coupled with the deep 3DS library, it will deliver countless hours of portable gaming fun. Just make sure you have that charger first.

Club Nintendo Announces Final Batch Of Rewards

Nintendo is putting up the shutters on its loyalty rewards program for good, but before Club Nintendo closes shop in September, the Japanese video game company is making available one final set of digital and physical rewards that members can claim with their remaining coins.

Last month, Nintendo announced that Club Nintendo will no longer be available beginning Sept. 30 to make way for a new loyalty program. At the time, Nintendo said that it would add "dozens of downloadable games and a limited quantity of exclusive reward items," and it seems as if

Nintendo is coming through with that promise by adding as many as 117 new games and a number of exclusive physical rewards that Club Nintendo members can claim.

Normally, Club Nintendo puts up as rewards eight or so random titles picked from its roster of games for the 3DS and Wii. For this final sale, however, Nintendo is including plenty of major titles for both consoles, including fairly recent, full-priced titles such as Super Mario 3D Land, which can be bought for 600 coins for the 3DS, and Kid Icarus: Uprising, also for the 3DS for 700 coins. For the Wii U, some of the most notable titles are The Wonderful 101 and Wii Fit, both of which can be bought for 600 coins.

Other interesting titles include classic games such as Pilotwings, Super Mario World and Super Punch Out, which are all available for the Wii U for 200 coins, and Paper Mario, Super Mario Kart, and The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past, which can be claimed for 250 points.

The rest include pretty much everything from modern and classic games, even including black-and-white old-school classics for the NES and Nintendo 64, which cost anywhere between 150 and 700 coins.

The digital downloads are obviously the star of the show, but Club Nintendo says it also offers more than the usual "random items with Nintendo branding." Members can also choose from a collection of physical rewards, including t-shirts, calendars, posters, greeting cards, toys and puzzles.

Some of the most notable items include a retro 8-bit Super Mario t-shirt for 700 coins, a Fierce Deity Link jigsaw puzzle for 800 coins, and a Legend of Zelda: Majora’s Mask 3D messenger bag, also for 800 coins.

As a bonus, Nintendo is also making available Flipnote Studio 3D free for all members who sign up before Mar. 31. Flipnote is a software that is used for making 3D animations that can be shared with others.

While Club Nintendo is more popular in Japan than in the United States or Europe, gamers can still sign up for the loyalty program until Mar. 31, the last day for stocking up on virtual currency by registering their products, answering surveys and completing other activities. All coins will expire on Sept. 30.

Gamers can check out the Club Nintendo website for a full list of available rewards. As of midnight on Tuesday, however, Club Nintendo is currently unavailable "due to site maintenance," and Nintendo isn’t giving any sign as to when the website will be back up.

Sony Exec Steps Down After Breach

In the aftermath of the Sony Pictures Entertainment cyber-attack in late November 2014, Amy Pascal is stepping down as co-chairman of the film studio.

The news comes after Pascal had her e-mails leaked to file-sharing and BitTorrent sites during the breach. Among the compromised details was a conversation with producer Scott Rudin in which they exchanged racially charged comments about President Obama.

On Feb. 3, Sony released its financial results for the final quarter of 2014, which reported that by Dec. 31, 2014, an estimated $15 million was spent on investigating and remediating the hack attack against Sony Pictures Entertainment. But Sony noted that owing to the "serious disruption of its network and IT infrastructure as a result of the cyber-attack," it remains unable to close its movie and television studio's books for 2014, and that the cost spent to date on breach cleanup remains an estimate.

On Nov. 24, 2014, Sony Pictures was hit with a devastating wiper malware attack by hackers calling themselves the Guardians of Peace. The White House eventually blamed North Korea for the Sony Pictures hack, and the FBI has released some evidence to back up that assertion.

A recent report from Taia Global claims that Russian hackers, using spear-phishing attacks, successfully breached the network of Sony Pictures in November 2014 and continue to have on-demand access to Sony's network. But it's not clear if those hackers unleashed the malware attack and data leaks for which the Guardians of Peace has taken credit, or if the Russian team was operating independently.

In a statement obtained by The Hollywood Reporter, one of the first media outlets to report on the executive shakeup, Sony says Pascal will transition to a new venture where she will produce films including the new "Ghostbusters" movie as well as future "Amazing Spider Man" films. As part of a four-year agreement, Sony Pictures Entertainment will finance Pascal's venture and retain all distribution rights worldwide to the films, the publication reports.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

The NSA's Director of Civil Liberties Renounces Secret Law

A year ago, Rebecca Richards joined the NSA as its director of privacy and civil liberties. As yet, she hasn't testified before Congress because, in her words, "nobody has asked." But she does appear on The Cyberlaw Podcast this week, where she is interviewed by Stewart Baker, a former general counsel of the NSA and privacy skeptic.

One noteworthy exchange concerned the public outrage at Edward Snowden's revelations and how the NSA can retain public support for its activities in a democracy.

"We've spent since the 1970s at least assuming that if we obey the law, whatever was left we could just do it and we could be creative and enthusiastic and aggressive and use little smiley faces when we succeeded," Baker said. "That turned out to be really devastating for the institution, because as far as I can tell there was very little

illegality, if any, established, except for a few things that the institution itself had punished. So it turned out that staying on the right side of the law didn't actually protect the agency from disaster. The question is, what lesson do you learn now that you know being legal is necessary but not sufficient?"

At the end of this post I'll return to the NSA's adherence to the law or lack thereof. For now, let's stipulate that some of its legal activities are being protested.

Here is how its director or privacy and civil liberties answered. An important lesson that "we're really taking to heart" is "no secret legal interpretations," she said. This next part is a bit muddled but worth quoting directly: "If the law on it's face does not if you have to go through too many contorted legal [inaudible], I mean what is legal? That's where we need to, not have perhaps cute legal interpretations."

(In passing, she mentioned the phone dragnet program, which is ostensibly authorized by Section 215 of the Patriot Act, though an author and prominent champion of the legislation insists that the Obama Administration's secret interpretation of the law twists its meaning to be contrary to Congressional intent.)

It's heartening to see at least one NSA official acknowledging that agencies should not "contort" the law with "cute" legal interpretations, though her interviewer didn't agree. "Isn't the problem there, you say I'm not going to have cute or aggressive legal interpretations," he replied, "but if you want to explain to people what your new interpretation is you kinda have to put it in a context of facts, and context of facts gives a lot away about how your program actually works."

I wish she would've said, Transparency about what the law actually says is a non-negotiable part of having a government by and for the people. Without at least that much transparency, representative democracy cannot function properly.

Instead she said, "I don't disagree. I think this is a work in progress." But she added, "I also think we've had 40 years in which we have not had, there's no demonstration from all of these different reviews that there's been really any illegality, but are we prepared for that for the next 40 years. Is the institution and what we're doing and how we're doing it sustainable both from a national security perspective and from a protection of privacy and civil liberties perspective? You know, we had this grand bargain in 1978, and it worked, but the technology has changed, the threat has changed, and so are we prepared for the next 40 years?"

At least one person at the NSA is publicly airing the possibility that, under current practices, it may pose an unsustainable threat to privacy and civil liberties.

One last point. Both Baker and Richards speak as if there have been no unpunished legal violations at the NSA between the Church Committee and today.

That is incorrect. President Bush's warrantless wiretapping was illegal. The phone dragnet is illegal. The Washington Post reports that "the National Security Agency has broken privacy rules or overstepped its legal authority thousands of times each year since Congress granted the

agency broad new powers in 2008." The NSA constantly violates the particularity clause of the Fourth Amendment, even when it gets a warrant from its secretive, one-sided court. And there are many more legal transgressions the nature of which the NSA hides.

Why The FCC’s Tom Wheeler Is ’Defying the Greatest Lobbyists in the World’

Tom Wheeler has made a career out of surprising people.

The 68-year-old chairman of the Federal Communications Commission is commonly called out as a former top lobbyist for the cable and wireless industry, a role he served for a quarter of century. Few remember his long career as an entrepreneur. Even fewer know it was one of his startups that informed his view of the Internet before the World Wide Web was even invented that s now driving his approach to Internet regulation.

In 1984, the then-38-year-old Wheeler took over NABU Network, which offered specially designed home computers that could access news, games and other applications through the cable television network. The National Museum of Science and Technology later described the network as the Internet 10 years ahead of its time. A few blocks from NABU s Alexandria, Va., office, 27-year-old Steve Case was working on a similar project that tapped into the telephone network, which Wheeler derided as inferior.

"We used to look down our noses at them because they were so slow," Wheeler recalled in a half- hour-long interview last month.

But it was Case s company, America Online, that became an Internet titan during the dot-com boom. NABU folded in 1985. The difference between the two approaches? Wheeler s company relied on a closed network.

"Steve [Case] could build a national footprint immediately, and we had to go from cable operator to cable operator to ask permission to get on the network," said Wheeler. "That is exactly the situation that entrepreneurs face today. If you can t have open access to the Internet, innovation is thwarted and new services grind to a halt."

As head of the regulatory body that governs the Internet, Wheeler is taking those lessons learned and readying the biggest initiative of his career: introducing rules this week designed to ensure Internet service providers give equal access to content and applications without blocking or forcing content providers to pay for faster delivery to their online customers.

The industry calls this notion Net neutrality.

Those in favor of the open Internet include consumer advocates, Internet companies such as Netflix, Reddit and Mozilla, and President Barack Obama, who declared in November no toll takers should stand between you and your favorite online sites and services. Critics of Net neutrality argue that too much regulation will stifle innovation by quashing investments in Internet networks and services.

Net neutrality advocates, initially wary of Wheeler because of his past association with the industries he regulates, now applaud his leadership.

Reed Hastings, CEO of the Netflix video-streaming service, likens Wheeler s stance to the one taken by business mogul Joseph Kennedy Sr. in 1934, when he was tasked with regulating Wall Street for the first time as chairman of the newly formed Securities and Exchange Commission.

"Chairman Wheeler is on the edge of making history by defying the greatest lobbyists in the world from the telco and cable industry to secure an open and fast Internet for all Americans," Hastings said. "You have to go back to Joseph Kennedy Sr. running the SEC to find as surprising and courageous an example of policy leadership given the person s prior background."

The once-powerful advocate for the cable and wireless companies has rocked his former employers on their heels.

"The joke around Washington these days is that the only thing that can bring together cable, wireless and TV broadcasters is Tom Wheeler," said a Washington communications lawyer, who represents some of Wheeler s critics.

The FCC is set to propose its new rules on February 5. A vote by the agency is scheduled for February 26.

The lobbying game?Wheeler, a native Ohioan who holds an undegraduate degree from Ohio State University, won recognition for his work promoting the cable TV industry during lobbyist stints for the telecommunications industry, first as the head of the National Cable & Telecommunications Association starting in 1976 and, later, the Cellular Telecommunications & Internet Association. He s the only person to be inducted into both the Cable Television Hall of Fame and The Wireless Hall of Fame, a fact President Obama once joked made Wheeler the Bo Jackson of telecom.

It was while lobbying for the cable TV industry that Wheeler met his wife, Carol. A lobbyist for the National Association of Broadcasters, she was fighting on the other side of almost all the issues he found important. That s how we got to know each other, Wheeler recounted in a 2009 interview on C-Span, a network he helped create while working at the NCTA.

Wheeler rose through the ranks at NCTA and, after only three years at the trade group, took over as president. He was 33 years old. It was an incredible learning experience at a very young age, and a very dynamic growing industry, Wheeler said about his career s fast ascent.

He left the NCTA in 1984 and took over at NABU. Although Wheeler knew little about technology, his former colleagues describe him as a relentless student who spent hours with engineers, asking them to explain over and over how things worked. Those conversations helped him form a clear picture of the communications industry s future.

"He is an entrepreneur," said Arthur Esch, who worked at NABU with Wheeler and has been a close friend for 30 years. "He was light years ahead of everybody we played with. And he would try to explain to folks, who probably had never even used a computer, that they needed to take look at what we were doing, because even though it looked like a bit of a risk at the time, they needed to get in front of the technology."

From 1984 to 1992, Wheeler worked with five startups, all related in one way or another with delivering data or content to the home or office. In

1992, he took over as CEO of the CTIA, and in 2004, he became a technology entrepreneur and executive at the Washington, D.C.-based venture capital firm Core Capital Partners.

"It s one thing to start one company, but to help grow an entire industry it s phenomenal," said Bryan Biniak, founder and CEO of Jacked, a startup that Core Capital helped fund.

"And he did it twice," said Biniak, who is now an executive at Microsoft. "He has a natural entrepreneurial bent that he brings to everything he does."

A wolf in charge of the hen house??Even in a town known for revolving doors between government and industry, Wheeler s 2013 nomination as chairman of the FCC raised eyebrows. Critics quickly portrayed him as a shill for the telecommunications industry, and his appointment was so contentious it helped make him one of the first policy wonks to become a national celebrity.

In June 2014, comedian John Oliver even compared the former lobbyist s appointment to asking a dingo to babysit a baby in a 13-minute sketch that propelled the Net neutrality issue into the national spotlight. Oliver s video has gotten nearly 8 million views on YouTube.

Four Senators Call for Federal Probes into Verizon ’Supercookies’

Verizon’s sweet tooth for cookies has dunked it in more hot water after four Democratic senators called on the US Federal Trade Commission and the Federal Communications Commission to examine the company’s practice of tracking customers’ web habits.

Senators Bill Nelson (D-FL), Edward Markey (D-MA), Richard Blumenthal, (D-CT), and Brian Schatz (D-HI), have sent letters to FCC boss Tom Wheeler (who has enough on his plate) and FTC chairwoman Edith Ramirez after deciding they are unhappy with the telco.

"This whole supercookie business raises the specter of corporations being able to peek into the habits of Americans without their knowledge or consent," said Nelson in an emailed statement. "That’s why I think we need to get to the bottom of this and perhaps new legislation."

Back in 2012, Verizon started an advertising information collection system that injected unique identifying headers (UIDHs) into every HTTP request to track visited websites. The program was technically optional, but the UIDH codes were added whether or not users wanted to sign up Verizon just promised not to peek at the results if you didn’t join.

Privacy campaigners started to get worried after AT&T launched a similar scheme, pointing out that installing undeletable cookies could leave people exposed to invasion of privacy.

Those fears turned out to be well-founded when research last month revealed that an American advertising agency, Turn, had figured out a way to install its own information into the cookies and use them to build user profiles.

Turn initially insisted it had done nothing wrong, but dropped the

practice shortly afterwards. AT&T likewise announced it was ending its trial of the technology. On January 30, Verizon too said it would discontinue the practice one day after the four senators sent a letter to the firm expressing concern about the use of UIDH.

Verizon sent a detailed response to the senators on February 4, but it seems that was not enough, and they have now asked for two formal investigations.They want the FCC to look at the general privacy issues of UIDH, and the FTC to find out how the headers were used by third parties.

The Senators' letter said that in the future the decision to install such cookies should be opt-in only, rather than requiring the user to remove themselves from a scheme. Legislation could be in the cards, but given that the the complainants are all Democrats who are currently the minority party in both houses of Congress there'd be little chance in getting it passed.

"Verizon takes our customer s privacy seriously," the company told El Reg. "We re aware of the letters and will respond."

China Tightens Rules on Internet Use, Online Comments

China announced Wednesday that users of blogs and chat rooms will be required to register their names with operators and promise in writing to avoid challenging the Communist political system, further tightening control over Internet use.

The announcement follows what technology companies say are official efforts in recent weeks to block virtual private networks that are used to circumvent China's extensive Internet filters. China has the world's biggest population of Internet users with 649 million people online but increasing censorship has chilled the popularity of social media.

Beijing has required Internet companies since 2012 to obtain real names of some users. But compliance was uneven and the rules failed to specify what services were covered.

The latest announcement extends that "real name" registration requirement to blogs, microblog services such as the popular Sina Weibo and website comment sections. Such settings offer many Chinese their only opportunity to express themselves in public in a society in which all media are controlled by the ruling Communist Party.

The rules also require Internet services for the first time to have users sign a contract that includes a pledge to refrain from "illegal and unhealthy" activity.

Wednesday's announcement affirmed an earlier prohibition against posting material deemed a threat to state power or national security terms the ruling party uses to describe opposition to Communist rule. It said operators will be required to deactivate accounts of violators.

The ruling party encourages Internet use for business and education but tries to block material deemed subversive or obscene. Beijing regularly launches new censorship initiatives to respond to changes such as the growing popularity of social media.

The Cyberspace Administration of China said the latest rules are needed to combat "username chaos." In a statement, the agency said users took inappropriate online names such as Putin and Obama, promoted "vulgar culture," committed fraud by pretending to be Communist Party officials or agitated for separatist causes.

Operators will be required to assign an employee to review and keep track of user details to ensure they comply, the agency said.

The government of President Xi Jinping has been calling on Internet companies since last year to "spread positive energy" online.

In May, Sina Corp., which operates one of China's most popular Internet platforms, said it was penalized for allowing "unhealthy and indecent content" online. Sina was fined $815,000 and stripped of two of its licenses for Internet publication and online transmission of audio-visual programs.

In a statement on its own Sina Weibo microblog account, Sina said it "firmly supports" the new measures. It posted instructions for users to alert censors to possible violators.

China operates the world's most extensive system of Internet monitoring and filters. It blocks access to websites abroad run by human rights and other activists groups, as well as popular services such as the Google search engine and Facebook.

Until recently, users of virtual private network, or VPN, services were able to skirt those restrictions to reach business tools operated by Google and other blocked sites. But in recent weeks, some companies that operate VPNs, which encrypt traffic to prevent censors from reading it, say tighter controls have disrupted their services.

The government has not confirmed it was responsible for the blockage. But an official of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, responding to a question about it at a Jan. 27 news conference, said, "harmful information should be managed according to Chinese laws."

Censorship also has eroded the popularity of social media such as Sina Weibo, which freelance journalists and independent commentators used to distribute news reports and essays. The number of users has declined since Beijing tightened control in 2013 over how such services could be used.

The number of microblog users as of the end of last year declined to 249 million, some 7.1 percent, or 32 million people, below 2013, according to a state-authorized research body, the China Internet Network Information Center.

Google-backed Experts Want 'Right To Be Forgotten' Limited to EU

A Google-backed advisory group has sided with the search giant in the debate in the so-called "right to be forgotten," which gives citizens of the European Union the option to have some personal information erased from search engines.

On Friday, the advisory group of experts including advocates,

politicians, academics and even Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales published a 44-page report backing up Google's stance that the regulations should apply only within the European Union.

See also: 11 free tools to protect your online activity from surveillance
In May 2014, the EU ruled that companies like Google must allow citizens the option to have personal information delisted from European search engines if the information is no longer "relevant." Google complied.

Then, in November, the EU adopted new guidelines that called for the rules to be extended globally.

The bone of contention here is that EU-managed Google domains, such as Google.fr or Google.de, would be required to delist certain information, but that might be meaningless. People utilize the Internet on a global scale; using a U.S.-based Google client, for example, could circumvent the regulations to find removed URLs.

Someone might want information posted about them to be removed for any number of reasons; maybe it's old, maybe it's unflattering, maybe it's a mugshot of a now-cleared charge or maybe it's an embarrassing YouTube video.

URL removal requests have generated a considerable amount of interest. Right now, Google charts the total requests in the EU at 212,673. The tech giant has evaluated and removed a total of 769,858 URLs.

The report noted that the "right to be forgotten" does not apply uniformly, only to information that is "inadequate, irrelevant or no longer relevant, or excessive."

The report noted that the "right to be forgotten" does not apply uniformly, only to information that is "inadequate, irrelevant or no longer relevant, or excessive." If there is an "overriding public interest," Google has obligation to remove a URL. According to the report, Google compensated the eight members of the advisory group only for their travel costs. They were not paid to participate.

Critics of the right to be forgotten worry that it could potentially impede freedom of speech, as global erasures could be considered a form of censorship for countries like the United States.

Although a majority of the Google experts supported the EU limitations, the group wasn't dissent-free. Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, former federal minister of justice in Germany, argued that the right to be forgotten should apply to all of Google's domains, not just those that happen to be geographically located in Europe.

"The internet is global, the protection of the user's rights must also be global," she wrote. "Any circumvention of these rights must be prevented. Since EU residents are able to research globally the EU is authorized to decide that the search engine has to delete all the links globally."

Why The US Government Is Terrified of Hobbyist Drones

If you want to understand why the government freaked out when a $400 remote-controlled quadcopter landed on the White House grounds last week,

you need to look four miles away, to a small briefing room in Arlington, Virginia. There, just 10 days earlier, officials from the US military, the Department of Homeland Security, and the FAA gathered for a DHS summit on a danger that had been consuming them privately for years: the potential use of hobbyist drones as weapons of terror or assassination.

The conference was open to civilians, but explicitly closed to the press. One attendee described it as an eye-opener. The officials played videos of low-cost drones firing semi-automatic weapons, revealed that Syrian rebels are importing consumer-grade drones to launch attacks, and flashed photos from an exercise that pitted $5,000 worth of drones against a convoy of armored vehicles. (The drones won.) But the most striking visual aid was on an exhibit table outside the auditorium, where a buffet of low-cost drones had been converted into simulated flying bombs. One quadcopter, strapped to 3 pounds of inert explosive, was a DJI Phantom 2, a newer version of the very drone that would land at the White House the next week.

Attendee Daniel Herbert snapped a photo and posted it to his website along with detailed notes from the conference. The day after the White House incident, he says, DHS phoned him and politely asked him to remove the entire post. He complied. I m not going to be the one to challenge Homeland Security and cause more contention, says Herbert, who runs a small drone shop in Delaware called Skygear Solutions.

The White House drone, of course, wasn t packing an explosive and wasn t piloted by a terrorist just a Washingtonian who lost control of the device while playing around in the wee hours. But the gentle censorship directed at Herbert illustrates how serious the issue is to counterterrorism officials.

The Phantom line of consumer drones made by China-based DJI figures prominently in the government s attack scenarios. That s not because there s anything sinister about DJI or the Phantom in fact, just the opposite. The Phantom is the iPod of drones, cheap, easy to use, and as popular with casual and first-time fliers as with experienced radio control enthusiasts.

With all the attention surrounding the White House landing, DJI felt it had to take action. So last Thursday it pushed a mandatory firmware update for its Phantom 2 that would prevent the drone from flying in a 15.5 mile radius of the White House. So far it s the only drone-maker installing what s known as GPS geofencing.

The technique is not new to DJI. The company first added no-fly zones to its firmware in April of last year to deter newbie pilots from zipping into the restricted airspace over airports, where they might interfere with departing and arriving aircraft. If a Phantom 2 pilot flies within five miles of a major airport s no fly zone, the drone s maximum altitude begins to taper. At 1.5 miles away, it lands and refuses to take off again. Municipal airports are protected by smaller zones, also programmed into the drones firmware.

For DJI, airport no-fly zones were a response to the growing popularity of the Phantom 2 and perhaps a hedge against the constant threat of increased regulation. We started seeing the community of pilots grow, says spokesman Michael Perry, and many users have no idea where they can and can t legally fly the drone. The guy in the White House incident, I m pretty sure he didn t know that flying in downtown DC is illegal. Rather than put the onus on every user to learn local air traffic zoning

rules, DJI translated them into code, and added a little buffer zone of its own for added safety.

The White House geofence is only the second one that isn t centered on an airport, according to Perry the first was Tiananmen Square. It won t be the last. Now that the company has perfected the ability to erect geofences at will, the sky s the limit or, more accurately, the skies are limited. DJI is preparing an update that will increase the number of airport no fly zones from 710 to 10,000, and prevent users from flying across some national borders a reaction to the recent discovery that drug smugglers are trying to use drones to fly small loads of meth from Mexico into the US.

This geofencing has critics, including hobbyists chagrined to find their favorite flying spot suddenly encompassed by a DJI no-fly zones. I live just inside a red zone and find it quite offensive that a company would attempt to restrict any potential usage in/around my own house, one user wrote in response to the first geofencing update last April.

One could theorize that every zone anywhere could be a restricted zone, wrote another. Thank you but no thank you. If I spend thousands of dollars then I want to fly wherever the heck I want as long as it is under 400ft and 500ft away from airports.

This is NOT something users want, another critic added. I have a good relationship with my local airports and have worked with every local tower or control center. I get clearance to fly and they have been great, but this update takes away my control.

Ryan Calo, a University of Washingtonlaw professor who studies robots and the law, traces the resistance to two sources. One is a complaint about restricting innovation. The second one says you should own your own stuff, and it s a liberty issue: corporate verses individual control and autonomy, Calo says. When I purchase something I own it, and when someone else controls what I own, it will be serving someone else s interest, not mine.

DJI, in other words, has flown into one a core discontent of the Internet age. Technology s no-fly zones already are everywhere. Lexmark printers and Keurig coffee makers have been programmed to reject third-party ink cartridges and coffee pods. Auto dealers are beginning to install remote-control immobilizers in cars sold to sub-prime borrowers, so they can shut down a driver who s delinquent with an auto payment (the technology already has resulted in a 100-vehicle automotive hack attack.) In 2009, some Kindle owners discovered Amazon has the power to remotely delete the book they re reading, after the company purged George Orwell s 1984 and Animal Farm from e-book readers, an action Jeff Bezos later apologized for.

The fate of small drone flights over DC may seem like a little thing a spat worked out among private players, wrote EFF s Parker Higgins in a blog post Monday. But these small battles shape the notion of what it means to own something and illustrate the growing control of manufacturers over user conduct.

While alarming to some, DJI s paternal interference in its customers flight plans probably will reduce unintentional incidents like last week s White House landing. But it certainly won t prevent the scenario feared by official Washington: an attacker looking to weaponize a drone. For one thing, hardcore drone hobbyists tend to be tinkerers, and sooner

or later their rumbling will translate into published firmware hacks and workarounds anyone can use.

Right now there doesn t exist any hacks to remove the geofencing or downgrade the firmware, says Herbert. I m sure they re coming. People will figure it out eventually.

But, he notes, drone fliers who don t want geofencing have many options. DJI s mandatory update only affects the Phantom 2 line ironically, the older Phantom 1 that landed at the White House isn t included. And Phantom 2 owners will receive the mandatory update only when they link their drone to their Internet-connected PC or Mac. And if you really want to exercise your own judgment when flying, DJI says you can simply buy from a competitor.

We do provide different layers of security to make it difficult to hack and get around, says DJI s Perry. But for those determined to avoid geofencing, there s an easy way to do that, which is to buy another quad-copter.

That may be true for now, but it s easy to see lawmakers and regulators jumping on DJI s mandatory update as an easy cure, and mandating geofencing industrywide. When that happens, you can expect that circumventing drone firmware, for any reason, will become illegal, the same way hacking your car s programming is illegal. One thing is for certain: Nobody willing to strap a bomb to a toy drone will be deterred.

The Pirate Bay Is Officially Back Up

After a month of teasing its return, The Pirate Bay team on Saturday finally brought back online the immensely popular torrent download service, almost a day before the planned February 1st relaunch, and users can now enjoy a fully functional website.

The Pirate Bay was taken offline in early December, after a police raid in Sweden. In the days that followed, the team did not give any clear signs that service will be resumed in spite of the raid, and only in early January preparations for a reboot were clear.

The company replace the counter that was counting the days since the service had been taken offline with a countdown timer pointing to February 1st as a potential relaunch day. Throughout January, more hints were placed on the sites, that suggested the service will be brought back to life, including images teasing a fully functional site, and the Phoenix bird symbol previously used by the team.

A few days before the service was supposed to resume activity, a report revealed that a significant part of the team has been removed from The Pirate Bay roster, and that a second version of the site might be soon listed online, and run by the people who lost their positions with the official Pirate Bay site.

Meanwhile, regular Pirate Bay users will have no problem finding their favorite downloads, as nothing appears to have changed sure, some of the latest releases are not yet listed on the site, but it s just a matter of time until that happens.

Twitter ’in Talks with Google To Boost Online Presence’

Twitter has reached a deal with Google to make its short messages more visible on the Internet, Bloomberg said Thursday.

In the first half of this year tweets will show up with Google engine searches as soon as they are posted, under a deal giving the Internet company access to the flow of Twitter’s 284 million users, the news agency said, citing sources close to the transaction.

Google from now on will go to search information on the Twitter web site and the process will become automatic.

Google and Twitter engineers are now working on the project, according to the sources cited by Bloomberg, who said the companies reached a previous accord from 2009 to 2011.

Twitter, which has yet to make any profit and is trying to convince Wall Street of its growth prospects, is trying to expand its audience and generate more ad resources.

It said Tuesday it will allow its advertisers to run ads on web sites outside its network.

Raspberry Pi 2 Is Faster, But Not Pricier

The next-gen Raspberry Pi 2 is on sale now, and despite its souped-up memory and CPU performance, it is still just $35.

The Raspberry Pi 2 runs a 900MHz quad-core ARM Cortex-A7 CPU and 1GB LPDDR2 SDRAM, which offers six times the performance and two times the memory of its predecessor, the company said.

The newest Raspberry Pi is compatible with the first-gen device, which has 512MB of RAM, a Broadcom BCM2835 application processor, and a 700MHz ARM11 CPU. Raspberry Pi 2 also looks identical to Raspberry Pi 1 Model B+, an upgraded version of the Raspberry Pi 1 that added more ports and some other improvements over its two-year-old predecessor.

As a result, connectors on the Raspberry Pi 2 are in the same place and have the same functionality, so existing users will find it easy to make the transition. Also, the board can still be run from a 5V micro-USB power adapter.

"Since we launched the original Raspberry Pi Model B, back in 2012, we’ve done an enormous amount of software work to get the best out of our Broadcom BCM2835 application processor and its 700MHz ARM11 CPU," Eben Upton, Raspberry Pi Founder and CEO, wrote in a blog post. "Nonetheless, there comes a point when there’s no substitute for more memory and CPU performance."

Workers have spent "thousands of hours" developing firmware and board support "to make Raspberry Pi the most stable single board computer in the world," he said. "It’s worth going back and trying out an old SD card

image from 2012 to get an idea of how far we've come."

The low-priced Raspberry Pi 2 is available for purchase from element14 and RS Components. "Remember you'll need an updated NOOBS or Raspbian image including an ARMv7 kernel and modules from our downloads page," Upton said.

Once you get the device, you can take advantage of "the full range of ARM GNU/Linux distributions, including Snappy Ubuntu Core, as well as Microsoft Windows 10," according to Upton. Windows 10 will be available for free to the Maker community later this year. Join the Windows Developer Program for IoT to get updates about that.

"Raspberry Pi has quickly become one of the Maker community's favorite platforms because their highly capable, low-cost boards and compute modules enable developers to bring their vision to life," Kevin Dallas, general manager of the Windows IoT Group, wrote in a blog post.

"Raspberry Pi 2 is a surprisingly powerful device that opens up the world of computing and programming to a huge range of people and skill levels," Dallas added.

The launch of the Raspberry Pi 2 does not mean the demise of its predecessors. The company promised its RP1 Model B and B+ will continue production, "as long as there's demand for it." Both boards will remain on sale for $35. Model A+, meanwhile, is still available for $20.

Here's How iOS 8 Cost Twitter Four Million Users

Twitter announced its Q4 2014 earnings on Thursday.

The company beat revenue and earnings per share estimates, but missed Wall Street's month active user (MAU) target.

Twitter reported 288 million MAUs vs. 295 million expected.

CFO Anthony Noto said the decline in users was due to Apple's rollout of iOS 8 in September.

"We lost approximately 4 million net users due to rollouts of iOS 8," said Noto.
Some Apple experts didn't understand Noto's explanation:

Twitter's investor relations team later clarified that they weren't blaming a bug in iOS 8:

Here's what happened.

In iOS 7, if you are logged into Twitter, the Shared Links section will automatically show you recent tweets from people on your connected Twitter accounts. iOS 8 got rid of that automatic polling, so tweets weren't immediately up to date. You can also follow RSS feeds in the Shared Links section, which may have reduced the prominence of Twitter links there.

Twitter said that another 1 million people dropped out as they upgraded and could not get their passwords to work because of an encryption

issue.

In a follow-up call with Business Insider, CEO Dick Costolo said:

There were two issues. One was Safari auto-polling, and that was 3 million users and we don’t expect to get those users back. The other issue that was more complex was an encryption issue related to the Twitter integration into iOS, such that when users integrated, a lot of them weren’t able to launch Twitter successfully. That was a much more complex issue, it did not have a one-size-fits-all fix, so the team here worked as quickly as possible to address it but it caused a large number of users to not be able to use the product, even those who were trying repeatedly to figure out ways to get in.

All in all, 4 million users is a drop in the bucket of Twitter’s total 288 million users, but the company only missed user expectations by 7 million, so it’s significant in that respect.

Sheryl Sandberg’s Bold Plan To Get More Women To Code

For all its cutting-edge innovation, tech remains a male-dominated industry a reality Sheryl Sandberg knows well.

Before she joined Facebook as its Chief Operating Officer in 2008, the 45-year-old author and mother of two worked at Google for nearly seven years as vice president of Global Online Sales and Operations. While Sandberg built an impressive career, she couldn’t ignore tech’s gender equality gap. So in 2013, she released Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead. Part-autobiography, part-manifesto, the bestseller inspired Lean In Circles: nearly 21,600 groups in 97 countries, where members support one another on goals like landing that promotion or handling a big job switch.

Now Sandberg is skewing younger. On Friday, Facebook announced a partnership with LinkedIn, LeanIn.org and the Anita Borg Institute to form Circles aimed at women studying computer science or engineering. Just 18% of female students major in computer science, down from 35% in 1985. By offering Lean In Circles on college campuses, Sandberg hopes more female students will choose a technical career and stick with it.

"The thing about stereotypes and it hits leadership, it hits technical fields is they’re completely self-reinforcing," Sandberg tells Mashable.

"The thing about stereotypes and it hits leadership, it hits technical fields is they’re completely self-reinforcing," Sandberg tells Mashable. "The reason there aren’t more women in leadership is because there aren’t more women in leadership. Therefore, we don’t think of women as leaders. Draw a leader, you draw a man.

"It’s a ’chicken and egg’ problem, and you just have to get more women in to make it feel more supportive for women. So given that it’s so male, how do you fix that? You give women peer support."

There are currently Circles at over 330 college campuses, including Harvard, NYU, Stanford and the University of Tennessee. Sandberg and LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner plan on doing livestream sessions with

students; Facebook and LinkedIn will develop programming and lend staffers' time to help identify women students to run Circles. The Anita Borg Institute, which puts on the annual Grace Hopper Celebration for Women in Computing, will offer educational materials and mentorship from its impressive rolodex, which includes Google X's Head of Display Vision Mary Lou Jepsen, famed computer scientist Maria Klawe and computing pioneer Frances E. Allen.

"This is a chance for students who often feel isolated or who don't feel confident to come together and learn from each other," says Telle Whitney, CEO and President of the Anita Borg Institute. A former computer scientist and senior tech executive, Whitney attributes a decline in women computer science majors to an erroneous, widely held mentality. "Right now, many students do not have exposure to what computer science can do," adds Whitney. "They really think they re just going to be sitting around in a very isolated way."

Students including Jessica Boles, a senior at the University of Tennessee, say their on-campus Circles proved instrumental. An electrical engineering major graduating this spring, Boles says her Circle became the inspiration for throwing her college's first-ever engineering conference for women in April. Meanwhile, Columbia University exchange student Maria Hollweck has launched eight difference Circles. Hollweck, who learned to code at 13 and landed her first job with a German tech company at 16, says being in a Circle reinforced her dedication to working in tech.

As for Sandberg?

The Facebook exec remains personally invested for her 7-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son.

The Facebook exec remains personally invested for her 7-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son. What it means to be male and female are pretty tightly defined, she maintains.

"Right now the world is pretty constricted for them," Sandberg says. "Maybe one day, my son will want to work at home and be a full-time parent. The world needs to applaud and support him doing that, because if you talk to working full-time fathers, that support is not there. One day my daughter might want to be a great engineer or a great leader, and right now, that s harder for women than it is for men. So, this is about changing that and changing that for the next generation."
Have something to add to this story? Share it in the comments.

Apple Turning Closed Arizona Facility Into Data Center

Apple said Monday it will invest $2 billion over 10 years to open a data center in the Phoenix suburb of Mesa that will be the company's fifth in the U.S. and serve as a control facility for its global networks.

The announcement comes four months after an earlier Apple plan for the 1.3 million-square-foot facility it bought in 2013 failed. The tech giant had a deal with Merrimack, New Hampshire-based GT Advanced to use the plant to make sapphire glass for its products, but the company declared bankruptcy in October after production issues developed. GT openly accused Apple of using a "classic bait-and-switch strategy" with a deal

that he called "massively one-sided."

Apple lawyers accused GT of making false statements about the deal, among other allegations.

After the GT failure, Apple said it would work to find another use for the plant. It also has been working to help more than 600 GT employees who lost their jobs.

"This multi-billion dollar project is one of the largest investments we've ever made, and when completed it will add over 600 engineering and construction jobs to the more than one million jobs Apple has already created in the U.S.," Apple said in a statement. "Like all Apple data centers, it will be powered by 100 percent renewable energy, much of which will come from a new local solar farm."

An Apple spokesman said construction on the new data center should start late next year, if not earlier. GT is storing advanced furnaces it planned to use in its Apple venture at the plant while the furnaces are being liquidated, delaying the immediate use of the plant.

Apple company expects 150 permanent workers at the site, in addition to construction crews and contractors.

Apple also has committed to building and financing 70 megawatts of new solar power generation, enough to power more than 14,500 homes.

Republican Gov. Doug Ducey, who took office last month, said the quick work to seal the deal with Apple showed that Arizona is the best state in the country to work and do business and works quickly to makes deals happen.

"Apple is exactly the kind of high-tech innovative company we want in the state of Arizona and we showed them that Arizona is the place to be," Ducey said.

He declined to say what additional incentives Apple was offered beyond a large package offered by previous Gov. Jan Brewer in 2013 and a $5 million tax credit for building solar generation the Legislature passed last year.

Ducey was joined at a press conference announcing the deal by Republican House and Senate leaders, who touted the agreement.

Minority Democrats who watched the press conference said they worried that Ducey's proposed cuts to schools, universities and the state commerce authority's incentive funds may hamper efforts to attract business.

"Economic development isn't just having a low-tax climate," said Sen. Steve Farley, D-Tucson. "Economic development means you have the people who are trained properly to actually be able to do the jobs that you're encouraging companies to come here and take advantage of."

GT's October bankruptcy and ensuing effort to shut down the factory marked a surprising turn after state, local and business leaders previously bragged that the plant would be a major boost to the Arizona economy.

Then-Gov. Brewer had hailed Apple's decision to open the plant in Mesa in

November 2013, calling it a sign that the Arizona's efforts to provide a pro-business climate were paying off. The state has cut business taxes and created several incentives designed to lure new manufacturing businesses in the past several years.

Apple's data centers provide the computer muscle for the company's iCloud, ITunes, Siri and other products.

Twitter CEO Admits: 'We Suck at Dealing with Abuse and Trolls'

The word Jezebel mentioned just about anywhere online is, in turn, a super-magnet for trolls.

But in a round-about manner, one of West's trolls has motivated a heartfelt mea culpa from Twitter CEO Dick Costolo, who's apparently stated baldly in internal memos that the company sucks at dealing with trolls and abuse, that it's sucked at it for years, and it's about time that it changed.

On Wednesday, The Verge published what it says are those internal memos.

The documents reflect a conversation started by an employee who asked what could be done about Twitter-enabled trolling after having listened to an episode of the public radio show This American Life in which West had described her own experience of being trolled.

From what The Verge says are notes leaked from Twitter forums, here's what the employee said on Monday:

A must read in its own right about cyberbullying. One section suggests Twitter can just do more.

I'm aware that Twitter is well within its rights to let its platform be used as a vehicle for sexist and racist harassment. But, as a private company just like a comedian mulling over a rape joke, or a troll looking for a target for his anger it could choose not to. As a collective of human beings, it could choose to be better.

(Note: Twitter hasn't confirmed the veracity of any of these purportedly leaked internal messages.)

The show, which aired on 23 January with the title If You Don't Have Anything Nice to Say, SAY IT IN ALL CAPS, focused on trolling.

One of the stories focused on West as she confronted the worst of her trolls: a man who actually apologised for his abuse of this woman, whom he'd never met and who had never done anything to him, yet whom he had tormented by means that included taking out a fake Twitter profile in her dead father's name.

To give you an idea of how diligently this unnamed troll abused West, it helps to know that he did his homework and knew details about her family.

The fake Twitter account included a real photo of her father, along with a bio that read:

Embarrassed father of an idiot; the other two kids are fine.

In a response devoid of excuse-making or any other C-level management-speak BS, Costolo responded to the employee who brought up the radio show:

We suck at dealing with abuse and trolls on the platform and we've sucked at it for years. It's no secret and the rest of the world talks about it every day. We lose core user after core user by not addressing simple trolling issues that they face every day.

I'm frankly ashamed of how poorly we've dealt with this issue during my tenure as CEO. It's absurd. There's no excuse for it. I take full responsibility for not being more aggressive on this front. It's nobody else's fault but mine, and it's embarrassing.

...and promised that Twitter's going to start kicking ass and taking names:

We're going to start kicking these people off right and left and making sure that when they issue their ridiculous attacks, nobody hears them.

Everybody on the leadership team knows this is vital.

In a followup message, Costolo took full responsibility for Twitter's sloth:

Let me be very very clear about my response here. I take PERSONAL responsibility for our failure to deal with this as a company. I thought i did that in my note, so let me reiterate what I said, which is that I take personal responsibility for this. I specifically said "It's nobody's fault but mine.

We HAVE to be able to tell each other the truth, and the truth that everybody in the world knows is that we have not effectively dealt with this problem even remotely to the degree we should have by now, and that's on me and nobody else. So now we're going to fix it, and I'm going to take full responsibility for making sure that the people working night and day on this have the resources they need to address the issue, that there are clear lines of responsibility and accountability, and that we don't equivocate in our decisions and choices.

In December, Shreyas Doshi, Twitter's Director of Product Management, User Safety, said that the company was working to make it simpler to flag Tweets and accounts for review, and would be adding more controls and features to its blocked-accounts page, including preventing blocked accounts from viewing a user's profile.

There's more in the works, Doshi said:

We are nowhere near being done making changes in this area. In the coming months, you can expect to see additional user controls, further improvements to reporting and new enforcement procedures for abusive accounts. We'll continue to work hard on these changes in order to improve the experience of people who encounter abuse on Twitter.

How do you block abuse?

Some have pointed out that auto abuse blockers that rely on shared lists of known abusers have actually been used to stifle speech.

One commenter on The Verge’s story, "gregorian," suggests that a Troll Killer Department staffed with designers and programmers who investigate complaints and act aggressively on them might be one tactic.

He or she mused about adding such a job title to his or her tax return: I would love ’Troll Killer’ to become a legit IT profession that you can write on your Tax form.

Tell it to Dick Costolo, he might listen.

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